

Neighborhood Planning Initiative



**Town of Blacksburg
Planning and Engineering
Department
961-1126**

What is neighborhood planning?

Neighborhood planning shows residents how to identify issues and concerns within their community to ensure Town staff is more responsive to their needs. It provides an opportunity for citizens to build a community within their neighborhoods by taking an active role in the communication, planning, and implementation. The Neighborhood Planning involves citizens, local stakeholders, town departments, community organizations, businesses, and institutions, and gets them working together, addressing land use planning and service delivery issues. The goal of neighborhood planning is to promote stronger, healthier communities by encouraging citizens to solve problems jointly. A successful neighborhood plan:

- Represents all of the groups within the community
- Identifies neighborhood strengths and assets
- Identifies neighborhood needs and concerns
- Establishes goals for improving the neighborhood
- Provides recommendations for reaching those goals
- Guides future development
- Informs local government of the community's policy and financial needs

Purpose of Neighborhood Plans:

Neighborhood plans offer a process for concerned people to work together to improve their community. Residents within the neighborhood develop plans with assistance from Town staff. Neighborhood organizations are encouraged to identify the needs and goals of their neighborhood and recommend strategies to achieve the goals. Goals may be as simple as finding alternative methods to address code violations in the neighborhood or as complex as a recommendation for design guidelines for a community

project. The results of individual neighborhood plans will become a permanent part of the Town's planning and development process.

The Collaborative Advantage:

Neighborhoods that work together to create a plan have an advantage. Town Council reviews neighborhood plans and uses them to provide direction for Town programs and projects that affect the neighborhood. Neighborhoods that create plans have the opportunity to document a clear vision of their own needs and build a consensus among themselves. These plans also inform businesses of what services are needed and what development will be encouraged. Plans can include measures such as developing a community newsletter, holding annual clean-ups, installing traffic calming measures, adopting a neighborhood conservation overlay district, establishing a neighborhood watch program, or developing a neighborhood-welcoming team.

Neighborhoods are encouraged to organize into planning areas that include a wide range of community needs and opportunities. This includes places for people to live, work, shop, relax and come together at public places. Some neighborhoods are large and offer a wonderful opportunity to work on a neighborhood plan. Smaller neighborhoods are encouraged to collaborate with neighboring areas and create a plan. All neighborhoods, that voluntarily come together to work on a plan, are offered the unique opportunity to help create the outcome of all of the recommendations included in the plan. This type of interaction provides Town Council with a greater understanding of the goals that the communities want for Blacksburg, and molds and shapes Town policies.

Neighborhood Planning Boundaries:

Citizens who attend meetings and share their views on the neighborhood determine planning area boundaries. The areas should reflect common interests, geographic features, and shared services. The key to an effective size for a planning area:

- large enough to present opportunities and provoke new ideas,
- allows for the group to work together effectively, and
- lets the group evolve based on their needs.

Why Establish Neighborhood Groups:

A neighborhood group serves as long-term representation for residents within the larger community. This group is comprised of people who live in the neighborhood, work on common problems, keep abreast of developments that can affect neighborhoods and are available to voice neighborhood concerns if issues arise. The Town's Neighborhood Planning staff is available to provide assistance to neighborhood groups to facilitate group meetings, provide suggestions on planning framework, offer technical assistance including research, mapping, and design. The Town staff's role is to coach residents through the process of goal development and to facilitate consensus building and camaraderie.

How to Establish Neighborhood Groups:

- Get organized with a core group of residents*** who can brain storm ideas together and who can create methods to encourage involvement and commitment to the neighborhood's needs and desires.
- Facilitate the Meeting*** by setting a time and place to meet and contacting residents to attend (Town staff is available to assist).

C. Membership - Developing the Group

- Membership is open to all persons residing within the boundaries and to all legal entities owning property or having a place of business within its boundaries. (**60-75% resident participation is recommended to establish an effective neighborhood group*).
- Writing bylaws is encouraged. Groups can self-appoint a committee (Town staff can provide a set of standard bylaws to be used as a framework).
- Determining who serves as spokesperson or electing officers is encouraged.

D. Develop Action Plan

- Become more familiar with the neighborhood (document or survey assets, issues, concerns, and goals).
- Develop coalition building by discovering and working with existing neighborhood organizations.
 - Encourage and recruit business owners and associations in the area to join and make them feel welcome to the neighborhood group
- Work with Town staff to minimize conflict with neighboring areas, town goals and policies, and learn more about the Comprehensive Planning goals and objectives.
- Identify objectives and priorities and develop a town-wide plan to implement them.

Neighborhood Enhancement Grant Program:

To support community goals and encourage neighborhood projects Neighborhood Enhancement Grants are available. The grants are non-profit in nature and are designed to help clean, beautify, add amenities, or otherwise further enhance the community. The Town

will match any neighborhood contribution up to \$1,000. The neighborhood can raise their part of the match with volunteer work and/or an actual dollar amount.

To be eligible the neighborhood must:

- ♦ have established boundaries, recognized by Town staff;
- ♦ hold meetings at least twice a year, in which all residents within the boundaries are invited to attend; and,
- ♦ have the requested project meet Towns codes or guidelines, which are identified during the planning process.

*For additional Information Concerning Neighborhood
Planning Contact*

Neighborhood Enhancement Program
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